

# Forging an Historic Partnership — DCMA and AFGE Council 170

by Mr. Terry Jones, Staff Writer

**T**he Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) and its labor union, Council 170 of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), are close to finalizing negotiations on an historic labor contract. “We have a tentative agreement in place and are now refining some wording and format details,” said Mr. Tom Maahs, president of AFGE Council 170 and DCMA District West field support representative duty-stationed in Chicago. Once the agreement is finalized, the contract will be sent to the Council’s 29 locals for ratification within 30 days and then reviewed and approved at the Office of the Secretary of Defense. When approved,

the contract will be the first that partners DCMA with a single federal employees’ union.

The agreement will apply to nearly 10,000 non-management DCMA employees eligible to be

members of a “bargaining unit” — a group of employees represented by a labor union. Known as the “duty of fair representation,” a union accorded representational rights over a bargaining unit must represent all employees covered by that bargaining unit, whether they are dues-paying union members or not. Representation can be for a variety of issues — “All they have to do is come to us for representation,” Mr. Maahs said. “We do not judge, we represent. If we can’t

get it resolved in the grievance process, we can invoke arbitration

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**(Above)** Air Force Maj. Gen. Darryl A. Scott, DCMA director (left), with Mr. Tom Maahs, AFGE Council 170 president and DCMA District West field support representative, in Maj. Gen. Scott’s office at DCMA Headquarters. (DCMA staff photo)

*When signed and fully ratified, the contract will be the first that partners  
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and request a third-party mediator to come in.” Over one-half of AFGE’s 600,000 members are consolidated into bargaining units. DCMA employees can determine whether they are in the bargaining unit and eligible for union representation by reviewing block 37 on their Standard Form 50 (Notification of Personnel Action) — those in the bargaining unit will have a status code of 630010. Determination of which employees are in the bargaining unit was made by the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) in a decision issued in February 2004; individual employees cannot choose whether or not to be included.

The contract will be the second major milestone Council 170 has achieved in its short but eventful history. The Council was established within the Agency on Feb. 20, 2004, after winning an election directed by the FLRA. Prior to the election and to DCMA’s split from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) in March 2000, three labor unions represented pockets of DCMA employees throughout the country. Each union local was required to obtain its own certification to represent employees within its jurisdiction, and none of the unions was certified to represent employees assigned to International District. “We all retained our own local certifications and bargained with our Districts both independently and as a group,” Mr. Maahs said. After DCMA split from DLA, the unions petitioned FLRA to represent the bargaining unit employees within DCMA. A tedious three-year process followed, culminating with FLRA ruling to hold an election to decide whether DCMA would have a union and, if so, to choose one union to represent the entire Agency.

The election was held Jan. 12 – Feb. 10, 2004, and all bargaining unit employees were sent a ballot. “They voted in favor of AFGE by better than two-to-one,” Mr. Maahs proudly recalled. “We made a difference when we went out and touched

[small] offices with few people, telling them about the election and who we were,” he said. “Our AFGE national office and the different councils ... provided support and helped us bring people to the polls. It was a huge success story for us,” Mr. Maahs emphasized. “The DCMA workforce made the decision to let AFGE represent them because of what we offered them.”

Since the election, Council 170 has worked with DCMA management to provide the best possible work environment for all employees, according to Mr. Maahs. “My perspective is that we share a common goal and mission,” he reflected. “We strive to satisfy all parties and, at the same time, realize and respect each other’s rights.” Soon after the election, Air Force Maj. Gen. Darryl A. Scott, DCMA director, appointed Mr. Maahs to the senior leadership team. In addition, Council 170 representatives have been appointed to serve on the many integrated process teams (IPTs) that work on Agency reorganization issues. “We want to keep everybody informed and help minimize confusion — the rumors and the fears that people may have about being relocated or maybe another RIF [reduction in force]. The more information we can share with the workforce, the better we all are,” Mr. Maahs said. “The general also does this with his Sight Picture newsletters, which he allows me to review and add information to — another example of partnership.”

AFGE, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is divided into 12 geographical districts consisting of some 1,100 locals. Districts assist locals with negotiations, grievances, arbitrations, unfair labor practices and lobbying activities. Although certification to represent DCMA employees is with the national organization, Council 170 has been chartered with the authority to interface

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with DCMA and represent the bargaining unit. In addition to Mr. Maahs, Council 170 leadership includes Mr. Bill Porzel, executive vice president; Ms. Maribeth Witkowski, secretary; Ms. Virginia Hemingway, treasurer; Mr. Mark Green and Ms. Patcy Wesley, District East vice presidents; and Mr. Wayde Howard and Ms. Joyce James, District West vice presidents.

So, what does union membership offer DCMA employees? The answer is numerous services, discounts and programs, including credit cards, loans and credit counseling. “We have home-buying assistance programs, two hours of free legal counsel a year, car-buying privileges and excellent insurance, vacation packages and educational programs,” Mr. Maahs said. A complete list of benefits for AFGE members can be viewed by visiting <http://www.afge.org/Index.cfm?Page=MemberBenefits>.

For DCMA employees interested in joining the union, it is as easy as going to the AFGE Web site, <http://www.afge.org>, and downloading membership form 1187. “They can access the

form electronically from the site and then hand it to their local representative,” Mr. Maahs said. “It has to be signed by the local rep, who will process the paperwork on behalf of the employee.” Union dues vary from local to local. “Some base it on the grade of the employee, some just have a flat rate,” Mr. Maahs said. Management personnel can also join the union to take advantage of the benefits. “We can’t represent them, and they can’t vote on any issues or share in any internal union information, but they can join to get the benefits that membership affords.”

Mr. Maahs, who has been president of Council 170 since 2003, strongly encourages union membership. “I have always believed in the old John F. Kennedy saying, ‘Don’t ask what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.’ Volunteer to be on an IPT, and take an active role. This is your career and your future. Don’t stand by thinking that someone else is taking care of it for you,” he said emphatically. Sounds like good advice for all of us.

## Benefits for AFGE Members

*When you join the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) union, you have access to numerous benefits, many of which are listed below. These benefits are backed by the collective strength of over 13 million members of AFL-CIO unions. By using one or two of the programs, many members receive in savings the value of their annual dues.*

### Money

AFGE credit card  
Secured Credit Card — Credit Builder Program  
Credit Counseling Program  
Loan Program  
Online Tax Preparation Service  
Mortgage & Real Estate Program  
Moving Van Discounts  
Pet Care Program  
Home Heating Oil Discounts in MA, NY, NJ, RI and Southern CT

### Education

2005 Union Plus Scholarship Winners  
College Financing

### Education (Continued)

Scholarships  
Online Education & Degree Program  
Online Training Program  
Union Book Store

### Computers

Apple Computer Discounts  
Dell Computer Discounts  
Easy Computer Purchase Program  
Unions-America Internet Service Provider

### Legal

Legal Services Program  
Small Claims Court Program  
Warranties

### Discounts

Music Discount Club  
Flowers Discounts  
Entertainment Discounts  
Union-Made Clothing Discounts

### Travel

Worldwide Vacation Tours  
Theme Park Discounts  
Car Rentals  
Union Plus Cruises

### Auto

Auto Insurance  
Pinnacle Motor Club  
Goodyear Tire & Service Discounts

Source: *Benefits for AFGE Members*, 2005, The American Federation of Government Employees, 12 Oct. 2005, <<http://www.afge.org/Index.cfm?Page=MemberBenefits>>.